

Connecticut Weekly AGRICULTURAL REPORT

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Connecticut Department of Agriculture
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GROWING CHERRIES AN AGRICULTURAL CHALLENGE TAKEN ON BY FEW IN CONNECTICUT

By Steve Jensen, Office of Commissioner Steven K. Reviczky

It's one of Connecticut's rarest and most sought-after summer crops, and a visit to the state's biggest sweet cherry grower reveals why so few cultivate them on any significant scale.

"Everybody has tried to grow cherries, but not many at all stay with it," said Don Preli Jr., a third-generation grower at his family's Belltown Hill Orchards in South Glastonbury. "Growing cherries is a hobby not a profession, and I always say that you better not try to make your living off of them."

While all crops present some sort of challenge, the cherry seems to be in a high-maintenance class of its own when it comes to the level of attention to its many sensitivities required to bring in a successful harvest.

"They take a little more finesse than say an apple tree," Preli said as he walked his 5-acre hilltop orchard on Belltown Road leading to East Hampton, nicknamed Belltown for the many bell factories that thrived there for decades.

At Starberry Farms in Washington Depot, Sally and Bob Futh tend to about two dozen older, large cherry trees that complement their 15 acres of peaches, nectarines, apples, plums, and pears.

"It sure is a challenge," Sally said. "Between the annual arrival of Cedar Waxwings just in time as they ripen, the invariable dry period when they should be getting big, followed by rain they don't need as they start to color and soften – it's not an easy crop."

Cherries have been grown at Belltown since the farm's original seven acres were planted with fruit and vegetables in 1910 by Preli's grandfather, Louis Preli.

He had emigrated from Northern Italy to South Glastonbury at age 14 to work with his uncle hewing railroad ties from enormous chestnut trees that were once prevalent in the area.

Louis Preli's decision to plant cherries followed the agricultural example of his neighbors, the Scaglias, also Italian emigrants who planted their first trees nearby in the 1870s.

"That's what they knew in the old country so that's what they planted here," Don Preli said.

In the 1950s, Louis Preli handed the farm to his son Donald, who progressively expanded the operation before turning it over to sons Don Jr. and Michael in the 1990s. Soon after, the brothers decided to plant dwarf cherry trees designed for the pick-your-own market, importing root stock from Germany.

And although cherries are only a small part of the 155-acre farm's output of blueberries, peaches, apples, grapes, pumpkins and Christmas trees, they command a good deal of the brothers' attention. Preli and other growers' list of challenges



Don Preli inspects a dwarf cherry tree loaded with ripening fruit at his Belltown Hill Orchards in South Glastonbury.

includes:

- **Winter:**

Cherry trees are very sensitive to cold and moisture. If winter temperatures drop to ten below zero, there is a good chance that the buds will be destroyed.

"The buds set in August for the following year so if they get burned in the winter you're done for the season," Preli said. "This winter we were a little nervous. We didn't get to 10 below but we were close."

Cherries also blossom early and are very susceptible to frost damage. At about 900-foot elevation, Belltown's cherry orchard is naturally protected from most frosts.

But just to be sure, the Prelis invested in a wind-producing machine that circulates air around the trees to prevent frost from forming.

- **Water:**

Cherries need a good amount of moisture to get started, and the dry spring forced the Prelis to irrigate in May for the first time ever.

But too much rain around the time they are ready to pick in late June means a mushy cherry, or one prone to splitting.

"The skin is so porous that all it takes is a heavy dew sometimes to split them," Preli said. "You get a good shower and they blow up right in front of you."

Bacterial canker from moist, cool condition is also a threat. So a good rain often calls for another chore - hauling out the wind machine to blow-dry the orchard.

(Continued on Page 3)

PA LIVESTOCK SUMMARY

Avg. Dressing

SLAUGHTER COWS:	LOW	HIGH
breakers 75-80% lean	99.00	111.00
boners 80-85% lean	99.00	112.00
lean 88-90% lean	93.00	105.50
CALVES graded bull		
No 1 120-128 lbs	467.00	467.00
No 1 110-118 lbs	497.00	520.00
No 1 94-108 lbs	540.00	570.00
No 1 90-92 lbs	620.00	620.00
No 2 112-128 lbs	457.00	480.00
No 2 102-110 lbs	519.00	520.00
No 2 94-100 lbs	555.00	570.00
No 3 100-130 lbs	440.00	480.00
No 3 90-98 lbs	557.00	577.00
No 3 72-88 lbs	595.00	635.00
SLAUGHTER STEERS		
HiCh/Prm 3-4	154.00	162.50
Ch2-3	149.00	158.50
Sel1-3	146.00	156.00
SLAUGHTER HOLSTEINS		
HiCh/Prm 3-4	138.00	148.00
Ch2-3	130.00	144.50
Sel1-2	133.00	138.50
SLAUGHTER HEIFERS		
HiCh/Prm3-4	157.00	160.00
Ch2-3	143.00	154.00
Sel1-2	144.00	148.00

NEW HOLLAND, PA

SLAUGHTER LAMBS: Non-Traditional Markets:		
Ch/Prime 2-3		
40-50 lbs	272.00	277.00
50-60 lbs	242.00	242.00
70-80 lbs	202.00	224.00
80-90 lbs	194.00	194.00
90-110 lbs	212.00	218.00
SLAUGHTER EWES: Good 2-3		
90-120 lbs	100.00	120.00
120-160 lbs	75.00	85.00
160-200 lbs	70.00	90.00
BUCKS		
160-200 lbs	110.00	120.00
200-300 lbs	78.00	78.00
SLAUGHTER GOATS: Sel. 1, by head, est.		
40-50 lbs	142.00	167.00
50-60 lbs	185.00	187.00
60-70 lbs	220.00	245.00
70-80 lbs	270.00	275.00
80-90 lbs	280.00	310.00
Nannies/Does:		
50-80 lbs	135.00	185.00
80-130 lbs	180.00	230.00
130-180 lbs	255.00	300.00
Bucks/Billies:		
100-150 lbs	270.00	315.00
150-250 lbs	405.00	405.00

NEW HOLLAND, PA.**HOG AUCTION**

52-56	200-300 lbs	56.00	59.00
48-52	200-300 lbs	55.00	61.00
Sows, US1-3			
	400-500 lbs	n/a	n/a
	500-800 lbs	34.00	37.00
Boars	400-700 lbs	12.00	17.00

WHOLESALE FRUITS & VEGETABLESBoston Terminal and Wholesale Grower Prices
NEW ENGLAND GROWN

	LOW	HIGH
BEET GREENS, 12 LBS	18.00	18.00
FIDDLEHEAD FERNS, 10 LB	45.00	60.00
KALE, BUNCHED, 12 CT	13.00	15.00
LETTUCE, HYDROPONIC, 12 CT	15.00	15.00
LETTUCE, LF, GRN, RED, 12 CT	10.00	10.00
LETTUCE, LF, GRN, RED, BSTN, 24	12.00	18.00
LETTUCE, ROMAINE, 24 CT	12.00	18.00
PEAS, SUGAR SNAP, 10 LBS	20.00	20.00
RADISHES, BUNCHED, 24 CT	18.00	18.00
SPINACH, 23 LBS/BU	26.00	26.00
SQUASH, YELLOW/GRN, 1/2 BU	22.00	22.00
STRAWBERRIES, 8 -1QT	30.00	32.00
TOMATOES, 12LB, GRHSE, VR	22.00	24.00
TOMS, HEIRLM, GRHSE, 10LB	24.00	25.00

SHIPPED IN

BEETS, NJ, BUNCHED, 12 CT	17.00	18.00
BLACKBERRIES, GA, 12-6OZ LIDS	12.00	16.00
BLUEBERRIES, NC, 12-1 PT/LIDS	14.00	15.00
BOK CHOY, NJ, 1-3/4 BU	24.00	29.00
CABBAGE, NJ, 1-1/3 BU, 12-18	15.00	15.00
CHERRY, BING, 9ROW, WA, 18LB	58.00	60.00
CORN, BICOLOR, GA, 4 DOZ	12.00	16.00
DANDELIONS, NJ, LOOSE, BU	18.00	19.00
ENDIVE, NJ, 1-1/3 BU, 18	15.00	17.00
LEEKs, NJ, 1-1/4 BU, 12S	16.00	20.00
MUSTARD GRNS, NJ, 12-16 CT	13.00	15.00
PARSLEY, PLAIN, NJ, 30 CT	24.00	28.00
PEACHES, SC, 1/2 BU, 2-3/4" UP	26.00	26.00
PEAS, ENGLISH, NJ, BU	75.00	80.00
PEAS, ENGLISH, CA, BU	60.00	60.00
SWISS CHARD, CA, BNCHD, 12	16.00	20.00
TURNIP, PRPLE TOPS, NJ, 25LB	20.00	20.00
WTRMLN, SDLS, GA, 10-14LB/EA	3.50	3.50

EAST COAST WHOLESALE HERBS

BASIL, NJ, 2 LBS, LOOSE	6.00	6.00
CHIVES, NH, 1LB, 12	8.00	8.00
CILANTRO, MA, 30/CRTN	16.00	16.00
DILL, NJ, 1/2 BRUCE CRT, 24	15.00	20.00
FENUGREEK (METHI) 24/CTN	22.00	23.00
MINT, NJ, 1/2 BU, 12	10.00	15.00

USDA CUT FLOWERS/WHOLESALE

ALLIUM, NJ, PER STEM, LNG	.70	.95
ALLIUM, GIANT, NJ PER STEM	3.25	4.00
BUPLEURUM, NJ, BUNCH, LNG	8.50	8.50
DELPHINIUM, NJ, BUNCH, LNG	10.00	11.00
FOXGLOVE, NE, BNCH, LNG	12.00	12.00
GERBERA, NE, 10/BNCH, LNG	8.50	8.50
GOMPHRENA, NE, BNCH, LNG	7.50	7.50
IRIS, DUTCH, NJ, 10/BNCH, LNG	7.50	7.50
LILIES, ASIATIC, ME, BNCH, LNG	12.50	12.50
LILIES, ORIENT, ME, BNCH, LNG	20.00	20.00
LISIANTHUS, NE, 10/BNCH, XLNG	19.50	19.50
PEONY, SEMI-DBL, NE, 5/BCH, LNG	15.00	15.00
PEONY, SEMI-DBL, NJ, PER, LNG	2.95	2.95
PHLOX, NE, PER BNCH, MED	9.50	9.50
SPIREA, NJ, 10/BNCH, LNG	13.50	15.00
SUNFLOWER, NE, 5/BNCH	6.50	7.50

MIDDLESEX LIVESTOCK AUCTION

Middlefield, CT, June 15, 2015

Bob Calves:	LOW	HIGH
45-60 lbs.	115.00	140.00
61-75 lbs.	360.00	370.00
76-90 lbs.	440.00	450.00
91-105 lbs.	455.00	460.00
106 lbs. & up	470.00	480.00
Farm Calves	490.00	500.00
Starter Calves	65.00	75.00
Veal Calves	195.00	270.00
Open Heifers	140.00	147.50
Beef Heifers	124.00	133.00
Feeder Steers	142.50	165.00
Beef Steers	124.00	143.00
Stock Bulls	145.00	185.00
Beef Bulls	128.00	138.00
Replacement Cows	n/a	n/a
Replacement Heifers	n/a	n/a
Boars	.01	10.00
Sows	n/a	n/a
Butcher Hogs	1@	40.00
Feeder Pigs	n/a	n/a
Sheep	50.00	110.00
Lambs	45.00	240.00
Goats each	80.00	250.00
Kid Goats	25.00	165.00
Canners	up to	110.00
Cutters	111.00	114.00
Utility Grade Cows	115.00	118.00
Rabbits each	9.00	27.50
Chickens each	6.00	18.00
Ducks each	11.00	20.00

NORTHEAST EGG PRICES USDAPer doz. Grade A and Grade A white
in cartons to retailers (volume buyers)

XTRA LARGE	2.26	2.48
LARGE	2.20	2.34
MEDIUM	1.93	2.06

NEW ENGLAND SHELL EGGSPer doz. Grade A brown in
carton delivered store door. (Range)

XTRA LARGE	2.80	2.90
LARGE	2.77	2.87
MEDIUM	2.34	2.44

PA FEEDER PIG SUMMARY

US #1-2 30-35 lb	130.00	130.00
35-40 lb	170.00	200.00
40-50 lb	250.00	260.00
US#2-3 20-30 lb	220.00	260.00
30-40 lb	175.00	175.00
40-50 lb	120.00	140.00
75-85 lb	80.00	80.00

USDA RETAIL CHICKEN

Price per lb.

WHOLE FRYER	.99	1.88
WHOLE ROASTER	.99	1.69
BREAST, BLNLS/SKNLS	3.17	4.99
BREAST TENDERS	3.53	3.99
THIGHS, BNLS/SKNLS	1.31	1.99

FOR SALE

1-R. Blumenthal & Donahue is now Connecticut's first independent NATIONWIDE Agri-Business Insurance Agency. Christmas tree growers, beekeepers, sheep breeders, organic farmers and all others, call us for all your insurance needs. 800-554-8049 or www.bludon.com.

2-R. Farm, homeowner and commercial insurance—we do it all. Call Blumenthal & Donahue 800-554-8049 or www.bludon.com.

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4-R. Packaging for egg sales. New egg cartons, flats, egg cases, 30 doz and 15 doz. Polinsky Farm 860-376-2227.

5-R. Nationwide Agribusiness Insurance Program, endorsed by the CT Farm Bureau, save up to 23% on your farm insurance and get better protection. References available from satisfied farmers. Call Marci today at 203-444-6553.

8-R. CT non-GMO grain and corn. Hay and straw. Pleasant View Farms. Louis. 860-803-0675.

53-R. There's still time to buy a Classic...but not much. New federal EPA-NSPS rules will soon eliminate your choice to buy a new Classic. Now is the best time to buy a new Classic. 203-263-2123 www.mywoodfurnace.com

55. John Bean/FMC Model 1229 Sprayer. 16 blade fan, John Bean 10 gpm@400 psi pump, 11 John Bean roll-over nozzles that enable you to spray either dilute or concentrate sprays by simply turning the nozzles over. Turning them half way turns them off. 100 gallon fiberglass tank and fiberglass blower housing (rust free) 3pt. hitch. Also comes with a "Green Guard" One Hand held spray gun---VERY easy to change from fog to stream; can spray with one hand and drive with the other very easily. This John Bean/FMC Sprayer is excellent for spraying vineyards, vegetables and dwarf trees. Operator's Manual recommends tractor with 35-45 HP. Comes with Original Operator's Manual. Sprayer is very simple in design and if you would ever need nozzle discs or a part, I highly recommend 'OESCOINC', formerly known as 'Orchard Equipment and Supply Co.' in Conway, MA. They have 70 plus years' experience with all types and make of Sprayers. We have done business with them for 35 years, and they have excellent knowledge and have helped me obtain whatever I needed accurately and got it to me quickly. Price further reduced: \$1,875.00 O.B.O. My email cidermill5@yahoo.com 203-283-4472 leave message.

60-R. NH 72 bale thrower. \$2,800.00. 75 HP Case IH JX 1075C, 365 hours, 4WD, cab. Like new. \$33,000.00. JD 4400 tractor, 4x4, with loader. Nice. \$14,000.00. JD 2320 4WD with loader, low hours. \$13,000.00. Kubota with rotary mower. \$3,500.00. 203-530-4953.

62-R. Kubota L3010 w/LA 481 front loader weight box 5 ft brush hog. 300 hours. \$16,500.00. 860-205-3396.

63-R. 2 horse sleigh. \$2,000.00 or Best Offer. JX 1075C 4WD, cab, air, 365 hours. \$33,000.00. JD 4600 4x4 with loader. \$14,000.00. JD 4400, cab, 4x4, snow plow, mower deck. \$9,200.00. Kubota 175 with mower deck. \$3,200.00. JD 2320, 4x4 with loader. \$13,500.00. 203-530-4953.

MISCELLANEOUS

6-R. Farm/Land specializing in land, farms, and all types of Real Estate. Established Broker with a lifetime of agricultural experience and 40 years of finance. Representing both Buyers and Sellers. Call Clint Charter of Wallace-Tustin Realty (860) 644-5667.

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DOAG UPDATING FARM STAND WEBSITE LISTINGS

Farm stand owners are encouraged to update their listing of contact information and product offerings posted on the Dept. of Agriculture's website: CTGrown.gov.

For an application form by email, please contact Jane.Slupecki@ct.gov or 860-713-2588.

Applications also may be faxed to 860-730-8322. Please make every effort to return by June 30.

**GROWING CHERRIES IN STATE A CHALLENGE
(Continued from Page 1)****• Predators:**

It's not just humans that love a firm, fresh-picked cherry. They're also a favorite of deer and raccoons – and especially birds, which have been known to wipe out half a crop.

"Starlings are our biggest problem," Preli said. "A flock of them will clean out a field in no time. They love sugar and they don't like strawberries so this is the first crop they really go for."

After watching birds feast on his orchard one too many times, Preli decided to make a major investment in mesh netting that covers all 500 trees in his five-acre cherry grove.

The sides are left open until the cherries are almost ready to pick, and the birds ready to pilfer. So instead of exasperatedly seeing his hard-earned crop get hijacked from the air, he now watches with satisfaction as the birds peck and claw at the netting separating them from their meal.

"Oh, they get pretty angry," he said with a chuckle.

Another advantage of the netting is that it allows the fruit to be left on the tree until it is perfectly ripe. The downside is that it takes an army of workers to hang it every spring and take it down every fall.

And the nets have to be lifted each time mowing or weeding is done in the long rows of pick-your-own trees.

"It's a lot of work and a lot of expense," Preli said, "but if you don't do it the birds will take everything."

• Western growers:

In the weeks leading up to its crop being ready, Belltown sells cherries shipped in from California, where few of the cultivation problems seen here exist.

Since western cherries are primarily grown in the desert, Preli said, growers don't have to worry about birds or too much rain, and can precisely engineer the type and amount of moisture and nutrients they are fed.

And in peak season, customers can typically find western cherries for less than the \$5 per pound Belltown gets from its pick-your-own sales.

"I'm embarrassed to be selling them," Preli confessed. "They just can't come close to what we grow here. We have natural soil and natural organic matter and that's what produces the great flavor."

Belltown has 12 different varieties of cherries that ripen throughout the two to three-week season, starting with Royalton and ending with Hudson.

Preli also grows about a half-acre of tart cherries, typically used for cooking or jam, which he said are in much higher demand with the recent influx of emigrants from Eastern Europe, where they are eaten like sweet cherries.

The situation is the same at Starberry Farms, where Futh says she could double the amount of the few tart cherry trees they have "if it were worth the work and worry."

Staehtly Farms in East Haddam no longer offers sweet cherries, but are growing tart cherries for use in pies and a cherry wine they are developing at their new farm winery. They also have seen an increased crop yield since netting their small orchard in 2012.

Preli said the payoff for all the effort and anxiety that goes into producing a cherry crop is the reaction of customers when he opens up the orchard for those few short weeks.

"On opening day we'll have cars on top of cars up here," he said. "People go nuts for them."



Clockwise from top: The 5-acre cherry orchard at Belltown Hill Orchards, covered by mesh netting to protect from bird damage; the farm's wind machine; a fruit-packing shed built with the help of a Department of Agriculture grant; a tree bearing tart cherries that have seen increased demand.

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